

S-E-C-R-E-T

(77)

MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: Soviet Policies in the Event of
Immiment Egyptian Collapse

For purposes of this paper, it is assumed that Egyptian forces face imminent and perhaps catastrophic defeat and that the ability of the Egyptian state to survive the defeat (and further Israeli military actions) is questionable.

1. Soviet military options in the circumstances described are severely limited. Neither time nor resources will allow Moscow to influence decisively the course of the battle now being waged on both sides of the Suez (see below for discussion of Soviet military options). In recognition of this key fact, in awareness of the risks (and probable futility) of direct military intervention, and in keeping with past practice, the Soviets are likely at this point to move immediately:

--to seek other means to deter an Israeli sweep deep into Egypt;

--to gain a stronger hold over Sadat so as to insure his compliance with the thrust of Soviet policy;

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--to seek effective ways to pressure Washington into encouraging Israeli restraint;

--to try to confine the crisis to its present locale, so as to avoid the risks of confronting the US in several areas simultaneously;

--and, the focus of all their efforts, to try to move all the prime actors into a cease-fire in place at the earliest opportunity.

2. Essentially, Moscow will be engaged in a damage-limiting exercise, seeking to protect as best it can the interests of its client states and to preserve its own position in the Middle East. Even before the Israelis moved to the West Bank, the Soviets had, we think, concluded that an early cease-fire was desirable. None of the other alternatives--prolonged indecisive fighting, a major Arab victory, or a clear Israeli win--promised much of a return for Moscow and

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all carried with them one degree or another of political and military risk.

3. In any case, under the given assumption, we expect the Soviets to mount a heavy effort to bring the fighting to a halt. Such an effort--in public, in the UN, in Cairo and Tel Aviv, and, above all, in Washington--would involve the use of threats as well as persuasion. The future of the US-Soviet relationship and of detente generally would figure large in the proceedings. And the possibility of drastic Soviet military moves in support of their threatened clients would probably be alluded to in all forums.

4. Though, as already suggested, we do not think the Soviets could in the time available to them significantly improve the military fortunes of the Egyptians, they would nonetheless see merit in creating uncertainty and concern in Washington and elsewhere about Soviet intentions. As in June 1967, they probably would not imply any specific action--confining their threats to notice that they would take whatever

actions they considered necessary to halt "Israeli aggression." If, however, they resorted to more explicit threats, they might imply that they were prepared:

--to intervene militarily in Egypt (and perhaps Syria as well) with ground troops and air defense forces;

--to provide the Egyptians with the wherewithal--e.g. Scuds--to institute terror attacks on Israeli cities;

5. It is possible, that, to give added weight to threats of this character--and to enhance whatever deterrent posture they deem feasible vis-a-vis the Israelis--the Soviets might actually move some of their forces into Egypt. Air defense personnel could be moved in quickly and might in some circumstances prove quite helpful to Egyptian forces, time permitting. Less likely would be the introduction of Soviet ground forces, except--conceivably--token forces near major cities to deter Israeli advances and lay a basis for subsequent claims of having "saved" Cairo.

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6. But the primary intent of any such Soviet involvement would be political--an effort (probably futile) to appease the Arabs and, more important, an attempt to stir up further pressures in the US (and through the US, in Israel) and elsewhere in the world for a quick cease-fire. The Soviets must be painfully aware of how little they can now do with respect to various military options--i.e. options designed in the main to have military consequences on the scene.

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Principal Conclusions

7. The Soviets have been caught once again in a crisis not of their own creation. They have in recent days been seeking to make the best of it, providing the Arabs with extensive military and political support, hoping that Arab forces would fight effectively, and gambling that events and their actions would not conspire to damage detente with the US, at least not irreparably. Current assumed circumstances seem likely to compromise any conceivable Soviet gains in the area, destroy any residual optimism concerning Arab military prowess, and perhaps further jeopardize the USSR's policy of improving relations with the US. A cease-fire, now, is really about the only half-way promising option still open to the Soviets. Should they fail to get it, chances of massive Soviet intervention are small. A complete Egyptian collapse would leave the Soviets with several dilemmas. They could try to pick up whatever pieces of the Arab world were still potentially susceptible to their influence, while working in Egypt to bring a more amenable leadership

to power. They could also seek to stay in the Middle Eastern game through peacekeeping arrangements with the US. Or, the Soviets could be forced by internal criticism^{to}/de-emphasize detente with the US, but seek to maintain it in Europe, building on European resentment over the US role in the Middle East and the impact of this role on European oil supplies.